PAUL VI'S APOSTOLIC CONSTITUTION "Divinae Consortium Naturae" on the Sacrament of Confirmation

The Sacrament of Confirmation

The sharing in the divine nature which is granted to men through the grace of Christ has a certain likeness to the origin, development and nourishing of natural life. The faithful are born anew by Baptism, strengthened by the sacrament of Confirmation and finally are sustained by the food of eternal life in the Eucharist. By means of these sacraments of Christian initiation, they thus receive in increasing measure the treasures of divine life and advance towards the perfection of charity. It has rightly been written: "The body is washed, that the soul may be cleansed; the body is anointed, that the soul may be consecrated; the body is signed, that the soul too may be fortified; the body is overshadowed by the laying on of hands, that the soul too may be enlightened by the Spirit; the body is fed on the body and blood of Christ, that the soul too should be nourished by God" (1).

The Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, conscious of its pastoral purpose, devoted special attention to these sacraments of initiation. It prescribed that the rites thereof should be suitably revised in order to make them more fitted to the understanding of the faithful. Since the *Order for the Baptism of Infants*, revised on the instructions of that General Council and published at our command, is already in use, it is now fitting to publish the rite of

Confirmation, in order to show in its true light the unity of Christian initiation.

In fact, careful attention and application has been devoted in these last years to the task of revising the manner of celebrating this sacrament. The aim of this work has been that "the intimate connection which this sacrament has with the whole of Christian initiation should be more lucidly set forth" (2). The link between Confirmation and the other sacraments of initiation is shown forth more clearly not only by closer association of these sacraments but also by the rite and words by which Confirmation is conferred. This is done so that the rite and words of this sacrament may "express more clearly the holy things which they signify. Christian people, as far as possible, should be able to understand them easily and as a community fully and actively participate in these celebrations" (3).

For that purpose, it has been our wish also to include in this revision what concerns the very essence of the rite of Confirmation, through which the faithful receive the Holy Spirit as a Gift.

To bear fearless witness

The New Testament shows how the Holy Spirit assisted Christ in fulfilling his messianic mission. On receiving the baptism of John, Jesus saw the Spirit descending on him (cfr. Mk. 1, 10) and remaining with him (cfr. Jn. 1, 32). He was impelled by the Spirit to undertake his public ministry as the Messiah, relying on the Spirit's presence and assistance. Teaching the people of Nazareth, he insinuated by what he said that the word of Isaiah, "The Spirit of the Lord has been given to me", referred to himself (cfr. Lk. 4, 17-21).

He later promised his disciples that the Holy Spirit would help them too to bear fearless witness to their faith even before persecution (cfr. Lk. 12, 12). The day before he suffered, he assured his Apostles that he would send the Spirit of truth from his Father (cfr. Jn. 15, 25) to stay with them "for ever" (Jn. 14, 16) and help them to be his witnesses (cfr. Jn. 15, 26). Finally, after his resurrection, Christ promised the coming descent of the Holy Spirit: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and then you will be my witnesses" (Acts 1, 8; cfr. Lk. 24, 49).

And in fact, on the day of the feast of Pentecost, the Holy

Spirit came down in an extraordinary way on the Apostles as they were gathered together with Mary the Mother of Jesus and the group of disciples. They were then so "filled with" the Holy Spirit (Acts 2, 38). From then onwards the Apostles, in fulfillment of mighty works of God". Peter regarded the Spirit who had thus come down upon the Apostles as the gift of the messianic age (cfr. Acts 2, 17-18). Those who believed the Apostles' preaching were then baptized and they too received "the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2, 38). From then onwards the Apostles, in fulfilment of Christ's wish, imparted to the neophytes by the laying on of hands the gift of the Spirit, to complete the grace of Baptism. Hence it is that the Letter to the Hebrews lists among the elements of basic Christian instruction the teaching about baptisms and the laying on of hands (Heb. 6, 2). This laying on of hands is rightly recognized by Catholic tradition as the beginning of the sacrament of Confirmation, which in a certain way perpetuates in the Church the grace of Pentecost.

This makes clear the specific importance of Confirmation for the sacramental initiation whereby the faithful "as members of the living Christ, are incorporated into Him and made like unto Him through Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist" (4). In Baptism, neophytes receive forgiveness of sins, adoption as sons of God and the character of Christ, whereby they are made members of the Church and given a first sharing in the priesthood of their Saviour (cfr. 1 Pet. 2, 5-9). Through the sacrament of Confirmation, those who have been born anew in Baptism receive the inexpressible Gift, the Holy Spirit himself, by which "they are endowed . . . with special strength" (5). Moreover, having received the character of this sacrament, they are "bound more intimately to the Church" (6) and "they are more strictly obliged to spread and defend the faith both by word and by deed as true witnesses of Christ" (7). Finally, Confirmation is so closely linked with the Holy Eucharist (8) that the faithful, after being signed by Holy Baptism and Confirmation, are incorporated fully into the Body of Christ by participation in the Eucharist (9).

Various rites in the past

From ancient times the conferring of the gift of the Holy Spirit has been carried out in the Church with various rites. These rites underwent many changes in the East and in the West, while

ever keeping the significance of a conferring of the Holy Spirit.

In many Eastern Rites, it seems that, from early times, a rite of anointing, not then clearly distinguished from Baptism, prevailed for the conferring of the Holy Spirit (10). That rite continues in use today in the greater part of the Eastern Churches.

In the West there are to be found very ancient testimonies regarding the part of Christian initiation which was later distinctly recognized as the Sacrament of Confirmation. After the baptismal washing and before the eucharistic meal, the performance of many rites is indicated, such as anointing, the laying on of the hand and "signing" (11). These are contained both in liturgical documents (12) and in many testimonies of the Fathers. In the course of the centuries, problems and doubts arose as to what belonged with certainty to the essence of the rite of Confirmation. It is fitting to mention some at least of the elements which, from the thirteenth century onwards, in the Ecumenical Councils and in the documents of the Popes, contributed not a little to casting light on the importance of the anointing, while at the same time not allowing the laying on of hands to be obscured.

Our predecessor Innocent III wrote as follows: "By the anointing of the forehead the laying on of the hand is designated, which is otherwise called Confirmation, since through it the Holy Spirit is given for growth and strength" (13). Another of our predecessors, Innocent IV, recalls that the Apostles conferred the Holy Spirit "through the laying on of the hand, which confirmation or the anointing of the forehead represents" (14). In the Profession of Faith of Emperor Michael Palaeologus, which was read at the Second Council of Lyons, mention is made of the sacrament of confirmation, which "bishops confer by the laying on of hands, anointing with chrism those who have been baptized" (15). The Decree for the Armenians, issued by the Council of Florence, declares that the "matter" of the sacrament of Confirmation is "chrism made of olive oil . . . and balsam" (16), and, quoting the words of the Acts of the Apostles concerning Peter and John, who gave the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands (cfr. Acts 8, 17), it adds: "in place of that laying on of the hand, in the Church confirmation is given" (17). The Council of Trent, though it has no intention of defining the essential rite of Confirmation, nevertheless designates it with the sole name of the sacred chrism of Confirmation (18). Benedict XIV made the following declaration: "Therefore let this, which is beyond dispute, be said: in the Latin

Church the sacrament of Confirmation is conferred by using sacred chrism or olive oil, mixed with balsam and blessed by the bishop, and by the tracing of the sign of the cross by the minister of the sacrament on the forehead of the recipient, while the same minister pronounces the words of the form" (19).

The anointing with chrism

Many theologians, taking account of these declarations and traditions, maintained that for valid administration of Confirmation there was required only anointing with chrism by laying the hand on the forehead. In spite of this, however, in the rites of the Latin Church a laying on of hands upon those to be confirmed was always prescribed before the anointing.

With regard to the words of the rite whereby the Holy Spirit is given it should be noted that, already in the primitive Church, Peter and John, in order to complete the initiation of those baptized in Samaria, prayed for them to receive the Holy Spirit, and then laid hands on them (cfr. Acts 8, 15-17). In the East, in the fourth and fifth centuries there appear in the rite of anointing the first indications of the words "signaculum doni Spiritus Sancti" (20). These words were quickly accepted by the Church of Constantinople, and are still used by the Churches of the Byzantine Rite.

In the West however the words of this rite, which completed Baptism, were until the twelfth and thirteenth centuries less defined. But it is in the twelfth century Roman Pontifical that the formula which later became the common one first occurs: "I sign you with the sign of the cross and confirm you with the chrism of salvation. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (21).

From what we have recalled, it is clear that in the administration of Confirmation in the East and in the West, though in different ways, the most important place was occupied by the anointing, which in a certain way represents the laying on of hands practiced by the Apostles. Since this anointing with chrism well represents the spiritual anointing of the Holy Spirit, who is given to the faithful, we intend to confirm its existence and importance.

As regards the words which are pronounced in Confirmation, we have indeed examined with due consideration the dignity of the venerable formula in use in the Latin Church; but we judge

preferable the very ancient formula belonging to the Byzantine Rite, whereby the Gift of the Holy Spirit himself is expressed and the outpouring of the Spirit which took place on the day of Pentecost is recalled (cfr. Acts 2, 1-4, 38). We therefore adopt this formula, rendering it almost word for word.

Laying on "of the hand"

Therefore, in order that the revision of the rite of Confirmation may fittingly embrace also the essence of the sacramental rite, by Our Supreme Apostolic Authority, We decree and lay down that in the Latin Church the following should be observed for the future:

The Sacrament of Confirmation is conferred through the anointing with chrism on the forehead, which is done by the laying on of the hand, and through the words: "Accipe signaculum doni Spiritus Sancti".

Although the laying of hands on the candidates, which is done with the prescribed prayer before the anointing, does not belong to the essence of the sacramental rite, it is nevertheless to be held in high esteem, in that it contributes to the full perfection of the same rite and to a clearer understanding of the sacrament. It is evident that this preceding laying on of hands differs from the laying on of the hand, whereby the anointing is done on the forehead.

Having established and declared all these elements concerning the essential rite of the sacrament of Confirmation, we also approve by Our Apostolic Authority the Order for the same sacrament, which has been revised by the Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship, after consultations with the Sacred Congregations for the Doctrine of the Faith, for the Discipline of the Sacraments and for the Evangelization of Peoples as regards the matters which are within their competence. The Latin edition of the Order containing the new form will come into force as soon as it is published; the editions in the vernacular languages, prepared by the episcopal conferences and confirmed by the Apostolic See, will come into force on the dates to be laid down by the individual conferences. The old Order may be used until the end of the year 1972. From 1 January 1973, however, only the new Order is to be used by all concerned.

We intend that everything that we have laid down and prescribed should be firm and effective in the Latin Church, notwith-

standing, where relevant, the apostolic constitutions and ordinances issued by our predecessors, and other prescriptions, even if worthy of special mention.

Given in Rome, at Saint Peter's, on the fifteenth day of August, the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, in the year nineteen hundred and seventy one, the ninth of our Pontificate.

PAULUS PP. VI

NOTES

1) Tertullian, *De resurrectione mortuorum*, VIII, 3; CCL, 2, p. 931.

2) Cfr. Second Vatican Council, Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 71, AAS 56 (1964), p. 118.

3) Cfr. *ibidem* 21, p. 106.

4) Cfr. Second Vatican Council, Decree *Ad Gentes*, 36, AAS (1966), p. 983.

5) Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 11, AAS 57 (1965), p. 15.

6) *Ibidem.*

7) *Ibidem;* cfr. Decree *Ad Gentes*, 11, AAS 58 (1969), pp. 959-960.

8) Cfr. Second Vatican Council, Decree *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 5, AAS 58 (1966), p. 997.

9) Cfr. *ibidem*, pp. 997-998.

10) Cfr. Origen, *De Principiis*, I, 3, 2; GCS, 22, p. 49 sq.; *Comm. in Ep. ad Rom.*, V, 8; PG, 14, 1038; Cyril of Jerusalem, Catech. XVI, 26; XXI, 1-7; PG, 33, 956; 1088-1093.

11) Tertullian, *De Baptismo*, VII-VIII; CCL, I, p. 282 sq.; B. Botte, *La tradition apostolique de Saint Hippolyte: Liturgiewissenschaftliche Quellen und Forschungen*, 39, Munster in W., 1963, pp. 52-54; Ambrose, *De Sacramentis*, II, 24; III, 2, 8; VI, 2, 9; CSEL, LXXIII, pp. 36, 42, 74-75; *De Mysteriis*, VII, 42; *ibidem* p. 106.

12) *Liber Sacramentorum Romanae Ecclesiae Ordinis Anni circuli*, ed. L. C. Mohlberg: *Rerum Ecclesiasticarum Documenta, Fontes*, IV, Roma 1960, p. 75; *Das Sacramentarium Gregorianum nach dem Aachener Urexemplar*, ed. H. Lietzmann: *Liturgiegeschichtliche Quellen*, 3, Munster in W., 1921, p. 53 sq.; *Liber Ordinum*, ed. M. Ferotin: *Monumenta Ecclesiae Liturgica*, V, Paris, 1904, p. 33 sq.; *Missale Gallicanum Vetus*, ed. L. C. Mohlberg: *Rerum Ecclesiasticarum Documenta, Fontes*, III, Roma, 1958, p. 42; *Missale Gothicum*, ed. L. C. Mohlberg: *Rerum Ecclesiasticarum Documenta*, V, Roma, 1961, p. 67; C. Vogel - R. Elze, *Le Pontifical Romano-Germanique du dixieme siecle, Le Texte*, II: *Studi e Testi*, 227, Citta del Vaticano, 1963, p. 109; M. Andrieu, *Le Pontifical Romain au Moyen-Age*, t. 1, *Le Pontifical Romain du XII siecle: Studi e Testi*, 86, Citta del Vaticano, 1938, pp. 247 sq. et 289; t. 2, *Le Pontifical de la Curie Romaine au XIII siecle: Studi e Testi*, 87, Citta del Vaticano, 1940, pp. 452 sq.

13) Ep. "Cum Venisset"; PL, 215, 285. The profession of faith which the same Pope prescribed for the Waldensians includes the following: *Confirmationem ab episcopo factam, id est impositionem manuum, sanctam et*

venerande accipiendam esse censemus; PL, 215, 1511.

14) Ep. *"Sub Catholica professione";* Mansi, Conc. Coll., t. 23, 579.

15) Mansi, Concl. Coll., t. 24, 71.

16) *Epistolae Pontificiae ad Concilium Florentinum spectantes*, ed. G. G. Hofmann: *Concilium Florentinum*, vol. I, ser. A, pars II, Roma, 1944, p. 128.

17) *Ibidem*, p. 129.

18) *Concilii Tridentini Actorum pars altera*, ed. S. Ehses: *Concilium Tridentinum*, V, Act. II, Friburgi Br., 1911, p. 996.

19) Ep. *"Ex quo primum tempore"*, 52; *Benedicti XIV . . . Bullarium*, t. III, Prati, 1847, p. 320.

20) Cfr. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catech.*, XVIII, 33; PG, 1056; Asterius, Bishop of Amasea, *In parabolam de filio prodigo*, in "Photii Bibliotheca", Cod. 271; PG, 104, 213. Cfr. also *Epistola cuiusdam Patriarchae Constantinopolitani ad Martyrium Episcopum Antiochenum*, PG, 119, 900.

21) M. Andrieu, *Le Pontifical Romain au Moyen-Age*, t. 1, *Le Pontifical Romain du XII siecle: Studi e Teste*, 86, Citta del Vaticano, 1938, p. 247.

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